



Omicron drives U.S. deaths higher than in fall's delta wave

By CARLA K. JOHNSON

Omicron, the highly contagious coronavirus variant sweeping across the country, is driving the daily American death toll higher than during last fall's delta wave, with deaths likely to keep rising for days or even weeks.

The seven-day rolling average for daily new COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. has been climbing since mid-November, reaching 2,267 on Thursday and surpassing a September peak of 2,100 when delta was the dominant variant.

Now omicron is estimated to account for nearly all the virus circulating in the nation. And even though it causes less severe disease for most people, the fact that it is more transmissible means more people are falling ill and dying.

"Omicron will push us over a million deaths," said Andrew Noymer, a public health professor at the University of California, Irvine. "That will cause a lot of soul searching. There will be a lot of discussion about what we could have done differently, how many of the



Jose Alfredo De la Cruz and his wife, Rogelia, self-test for COVID-19 at a No Cost COVID-19 Drive-Through event provided the GUARDaHEART Foundation for the City of Whittier community and the surrounding areas at the Guirado Park in Whittier, Calif., on Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022.

Associated Press

deaths were preventable." The average daily death

toll is now at the same level as last February, when the

country was slowly coming off its all-time high of 3,300 a day.

Continued on next page

LIVE ENTERTAINMENT 7 DAYS A WEEK

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|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| SUNDAY: TICO KOCK STEEL DRUM 4 - 6pm | MONDAY: ANGELA FLORES VIOLINIST 6:30 - 8:30pm | TUESDAY: JEAN PAUL SAXOPHONIST 6:30 - 8:30pm | WEDNESDAY: PAULA RIDERSTAP SINGER 6:30 - 8:30pm | THURSDAY: RICKY THOMAS GUITAR 7 - 9pm | FRIDAY: RICKY THOMAS GUITAR 7 - 9pm | SATURDAY: ANGELA FLORES VIOLINIST 6:30 - 8:30pm |
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Continued from Front

More Americans are taking precautionary measures against the virus than before the omicron surge, according to a AP-NORC poll this week. But many people, fatigued by crisis, are returning to some level of normality with hopes that vaccinations or prior infections will protect them.

Omicron symptoms are often milder, and some infected people show none, researchers agree. But like the flu, it can be deadly, especially for people who are older, have other health problems or who are unvaccinated.

"Importantly, 'milder' does not mean 'mild,'" Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said this week during a White House briefing.

Until recently, Chuck Culotta was a healthy middle-aged man who ran a power-washing business in Milford, Delaware. As the omicron wave was ravaging the Northeast, he felt the first symptoms before Christmas and tested positive on Christmas Day. He died less than a week later, on Dec. 31, nine days short of his 51st birthday.

He was unvaccinated, said his brother, Todd, because he had questions about the long-term effects of the vaccine.

"He just wasn't sure it was



McKenna Brown, 10, is given her vaccination card from Pharmacist Clint Hopkins as she was given a Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at Pucci's Pharmacy in Sacramento, Calif., Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022.

Associated Press

the right thing to do — yet," said Todd Culotta, who got his shots during the summer. At one urban hospital in Kansas, 50 COVID-19 patients have died this month and more than 200 are being treated. University of Kansas Hospital in Kansas City, Kansas, posted a video from its morgue showing bagged bodies in a refrigeration unit and a worker marking one white body bag with the word "COVID." "This is real," said Ciara Wright, the hospital's deceased affairs coordinator. "Our concerns are, 'Are the funeral homes going to come fast enough?' We do

have access to a refrigerated truck. We don't want to use it if we don't have to." Dr. Katie Dennis, a pathologist who does autopsies for the health system, said the morgue has been at or above capacity almost every day in January, "which is definitely unusual." With more than 878,000 deaths, the United States has the largest COVID-19 toll of any nation. During the coming week, almost every U.S. state will see a faster increase in deaths, although deaths have peaked in a few states, including New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Maryland, Alaska and

Georgia, according to the COVID-19 Forecast Hub. New hospital admissions have started to fall for all age groups, according to CDC data, and a drop in deaths is expected to follow. "In a pre-pandemic world, during some flu seasons, we see 10,000 or 15,000 deaths. We see that in the course of a week sometimes with COVID," said Nicholas Reich, who aggregates coronavirus projections for the hub in collaboration with the CDC. "The toll and the sadness and suffering is staggering and very humbling," said Reich, a professor of

biostatistics at University of Massachusetts, Amherst. In other developments:

— The White House said Friday that about 60 million households ordered 240 million home-test kits under a new government program to expand testing opportunities. The government also said it has shipped tens of millions of masks to convenient locations around the country, including deliveries Friday to community centers in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia.

— The national drugstore chain Walgreens is among pharmacies receiving the government-provided masks. The chain has started offering N95 masks for free at several stores, as long as supplies last. The company's website lists locations in the Midwest for the initial wave of stores offering masks, but Walgreens said more stores will offer them soon.

— The leading organization for state and local public health officials has called on governments to stop conducting widespread contact tracing, saying it's no longer necessary. The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials urged governments to focus contact tracing efforts on high-risk, vulnerable populations such as people in homeless shelters and nursing homes. □

U.S. judge may suspend mustang roundup in Nevada; suit pending



A livestock helicopter pilot rounds up wild horses from the Fox & Lake Herd Management Area on July 13, 2008, in Washoe County, Nev., near the town of Empire, Nev.

Associated Press

By SCOTT SONNER
Associated Press
RENO, Nev. (AP) — A fed-

eral judge is considering temporarily suspending the capture of wild horses in

Nevada where their advocates say the federal government is "needlessly and recklessly" killing free-roaming mustangs in violation of U.S. laws.

U.S. District Judge Miranda Du says she expects to rule by Monday, maybe sooner, on the advocates' request for an emergency court order pending another hearing next week to learn more about the potential danger of roundup near the Utah state line.

The Bureau of Land Management insists it must gather the mustangs before the end of February — one of several scheduled on an expedited basis across the West due to severe drought.

"If the court grants the temporary restraining order and sets a hearing next week ... halts the gather for a few days through next week, what's the harm?" Du asked lawyers representing the agency Wednesday during a hastily called hearing in Reno.

Maggie Smith, a Justice Department lawyer, said a delay of even two or three days would prevent the agency from completing the removals before the end of the year.

The bureau is prohibited from using helicopters to drive the herds into temporary corrals from March 1 to June 1 when mares typically are pregnant and give birth. After that, the

summer heat adds stress on the animals and in the fall, contractor availability becomes a problem, Smith said.

The horse advocates say the agency is squeezing the roundup of 2,030 horses in Nevada into a month under an illegal environmental assessment of a series of gathers over 10 years. Of the 1,048 gathered as of Wednesday, the bureau says 11 have died.

The horse groups say the low-flying helicopters combined with "unsafe muddy conditions on the ground in mid-January create a purely artificial hazard that is deadly to these wild horses, a congressional protected, public natural resource." □

Federal judge throws out oil lease sale in Gulf of Mexico

By MATTHEW DALY

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal court has rejected a plan to lease millions of acres in the Gulf of Mexico for offshore oil drilling, saying the Biden administration did not adequately take into account the lease sale's effect on planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions, violating a bedrock environmental law.

The decision by U.S. District Judge Rudolph Contreras in Washington on Thursday sends the proposed lease sale back to the Interior Department to decide next steps. The judge said it was up to Interior to decide whether to go forward with the sale after a revised review, scrap it or take other steps.

Environmental groups hailed the decision and said the ruling gave President Joe Biden a chance to follow through on a campaign promise to stop offshore leasing in federal waters. The decision was released on the one-year anniversary of a federal leasing moratorium Biden ordered as part of his efforts to combat climate change.

"We are pleased that the



A man wears a face mask as he fishes near docked oil drilling platforms, on May 8, 2020, in Port Aransas, Texas.

Associated Press

court invalidated Interior's illegal lease sale," said Brettney Hardy, a senior attorney for Earthjustice, one of the environmental groups that challenged the sale.

"This administration must meet this critical moment and honor the campaign promises President Biden made by stopping offshore leasing once and for all," Hardy added. "We simply

cannot continue to make investments in the fossil fuel industry to the peril of our communities and increasingly warming planet."

A spokeswoman for Interior Secretary Deb Haaland said the agency was reviewing the decision. The administration was "compelled to proceed with Lease Sale 257" following a court ruling in Louisi-

ana, spokeswoman Melissa Schwartz said.

Interior has "documented serious deficiencies in the federal oil and gas program," Schwartz said, and Haaland has recommended an overhaul of the nation's oil and gas leasing program to limit areas available for energy development and raise costs for energy companies to drill on public land and water.

"Especially in the face of the climate crisis, we need to take the time to make significant and long overdue programmatic reforms," Schwartz said. "Our public lands and waters must be protected for generations to come."

Energy companies including Shell, BP, Chevron and ExxonMobil offered a combined \$192 million for drilling rights on federal oil and gas reserves in the Gulf of Mexico in November.

The Interior Department auction came after attorneys general from Republican states led by Louisiana successfully challenged a suspension on sales that Biden imposed when he took office.

Companies bid on 308 tracts totaling nearly 2,700 square miles (6,950 square kilometers). It marked the largest acreage and second-highest bid total since Gulf-wide bidding resumed in 2017.

The auction was conducted even as Biden has tried to cajole other world leaders into strengthening efforts against global warming, including at United Nations climate talks in Scotland in early November.

□

In blow to telecoms, California's net neutrality law upheld

By BARBARA ORTUTAY

A federal appeals court has upheld California's net neutrality law, rejecting an attempt by telecommunications industry groups to prevent the state from enforcing it.

The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a previous ruling, which means the status quo stays and the state can continue to enforce the law. This means California can continue its ban on internet providers slowing down or blocking access to websites and applications that don't pay for premium service.

California's net neutrality law was signed by former Gov. Jerry Brown in 2018. That came after regulators during the Trump administration killed federal net

neutrality rules designed to prevent AT&T, Comcast, Verizon and other major internet providers from exploiting their dominance to favor certain services or apps over others.

In response, seven states and Puerto Rico enacted their own net neutrality policies. The most expansive effort of this sort was in California, which started enforcing the law last year, with potentially significant consequences for the rest of the U.S.

The Trump administration sued to block California's 2018 law, preventing it from taking effect for years, but the Biden administration has dropped that lawsuit. On Friday, proponents of net neutrality cheered the court's decision, but called

for federal net neutrality laws.

"This win is significant because it offers protections to people in our most populous state and drives the national conversation forward," said Matt Wood, vice president of policy and general counsel of consumer advocacy group Free Press, in a statement. "Yet tremendous as it is, we still need the Biden FCC to reclaim its authority not just for nationwide open-internet rules, but for policies promoting affordable, resilient, just and reasonable internet connections for everyone."

Big telecom companies oppose the stricter regulation that comes with the net neutrality rules and have fought it fiercely in



In this June 19, 2018, file photo, a router and internet switch are displayed.

Associated Press

court. They say the regulations can undermine investment in broadband and introduce uncertainty about what were acceptable business practices. They say they prefer a national approach to a state-

by-state one, but the industry has fought prior federal net neutrality rules. But with a Senate divided 50-50 between the parties, legislation in Congress may not draw enough support to pass. □

Winter storm to bring blizzard conditions to US East Coast

By PHILIP MARCELO

BOSTON (AP) — Residents and officials across the Northeast and mid-Atlantic regions of the U.S. were bracing for a powerful winter storm expected to produce blizzard conditions Friday and Saturday.

Heavy snow and strong winds were forecasted to begin in parts of the Carolinas and Appalachia on Friday evening, according to the National Weather Service.

The system will then intensify as a nor'easter and bring snowy conditions up the East Coast to New England, where forecasters warned of localized snowfall totals of up to 20 inches (51 centimeters) and wind gusts of 50 to 60 mph (80 kph to 96 kph).

Local officials Friday rushed to declare snow emergencies and impose parking bans, warning that wind-blown snow could make travel nearly impossible and colder temperatures could mean dangerous wind chills after the storm passes Saturday night.

In Virginia, where a blizzard earlier this month stranded hundreds of motorists along a major interstate high-



Kenneth Wolfe, of Pine Grove, walks along Clubhouse Road by Sweet Arrow Lake County Park in Pine Grove, Pa., on Friday, Jan. 28, 2022.

Associated Press

way for hours, Gov. Glenn Youngkin declared a state of emergency and said officials have already begun to position its resources in anticipation of downed trees, electrical outages and major impacts to travel.

The state's Eastern Shore faced possible blizzard conditions that could bring winds as high as 50 mph (80 kph), up to a foot of heavy

and wet snow and possibly tidal flooding.

"The key message for all Virginians is to stay aware of the weather conditions and to stay off the roads if possible," the governor said.

Similar snowfall projections were expected up the coast to the Philadelphia and New York City areas, with seaside communities from the Jersey Shore to

suburban Long Island and southeastern Connecticut potentially seeing heavier snowfall rates and stronger winds.

In Ocean City, New Jersey, Mayor Jay Gillian pre-emptively addressed an enduring peeve of snowbound homeowners: plow trucks burying driveways that residents had just dug out of. "The plows cannot work without creating snow

banks," he dryly reminded in a post on the city's website. "You may have to clear your driveway or parked vehicle more than once."

Airlines braced for the highest single-day total of cancellations in three weeks. By midday Friday, airlines had canceled more than 1,000 flights in the U.S., and they had already scrubbed about 2,500 scheduled for Saturday, according to tracking service FlightAware. The hardest-hit airports included those in Chicago, the New York City area and Boston.

In New England, where isolated snow bands could dump nearly 3 feet (1 meter) in spots, the inevitable, shelf-clearing rush for bread, eggs, milk and other vittles at grocery stores was well underway Friday.

Merrick McCormack, 51, of Cranston, Rhode Island, was among hundreds who packed a Shaw's Supermarket in neighboring Warwick for last-minute items. With the entire state under a blizzard warning, state officials mobilized more than 500 snow plows and Gov. Daniel McKee scrubbed a planned trip to Washington, D.C. □

Gov tells Bette Midler to kiss dog's 'hiney' -- and shows it



West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice holds up his dog Babydog's rear end as a message to people who've doubted the state as he comes to the end of his State of the State speech in the House chambers, Thursday, Jan. 27, 2022, in Charleston, W.Va.

Associated Press

By LEAH WILLINGHAM

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — Gov. Jim Justice has a message for singer and actress Bette Midler, who called

West Virginians "poor, illiterate and strung out" in a tweet after Sen. Joe Manchin refused to support President Joe Biden's Build

Back Better Act.

The 70-year-old Republican governor ended his televised State of the State address Thursday night by lifting up his English bulldog and flashing its rear end to the cameras and crowd. "Babydog tells Bette Midler and all those out there: Kiss her hiney," Justice said, grinning as people applauded and some gave him a standing ovation. Justice had spent more than an hour touting the state's accomplishments, including two recently announced economic development projects.

"Absolutely too many people doubted us," he said. "They never believed in West Virginia. ... They told every bad joke in the world about us."

The crowd in the House of

Delegates gallery included lawmakers, state Supreme Court justices, agency heads and members of the high school girl's basketball team Justice coaches, who were sitting in the gallery.

Not everyone was amused. In a tweet, West Virginia Democratic Del. Shawn Fluharty called the move "embarrassing and beneath the office."

"The @WVGovernor brought his Babydog and pony show to the State of the State and pulled this stunt as some bold statement. It was nothing short of embarrassing and beneath the office," he said. "Jim Justice habitually lowers the bar of our state. They don't laugh with us, but at us."

Manchin, a Democrat, effectively tanked his party's

signature \$2 trillion domestic policy initiative that would have poured billions of dollars into child care, health care and other services.

"What #JoeManchin, who represents a population smaller than Brooklyn, has done to the rest of America, who wants to move forward, not backward, like his state, is horrible," Midler tweeted. "He sold us out. He wants us all to be just like his state, West Virginia. Poor, illiterate and strung out."

After receiving backlash, Midler apologized "to the good people of WVA" for her "outburst" in follow-up tweet later that day.

The Associated Press sent an email to Midler's publicist Friday requesting comment. □

U.S. Consulate warns Los Cabos hospital preys on Americans

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The U.S. government is warning Americans to avoid a hospital at a Mexican beach destination, following years of complaints that the facility preyed on Americans by overcharging, bullying them and refusing to release medical records. More than 100,000 U.S. tourists arrive to Los Cabos at the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula each month, drawn by its beaches and dramatic desert landscape. It appears they are not only a boon to the hotels and restaurants of twin towns Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo, but also St. Luke's Hospital in Cabo San Lucas.

Multiple complaints have been filed by U.S. citizens saying the hospital demanded tens of thousands of dollars in advance payments, threatened patients' relatives and refused to release clinical reports on what care they had actually provided. That led the U.S. consulate in Tijuana to issue the unusual "health alert" Wednesday about St.



Tourists walk on the beach in Cabo San Lucas, in Mexico's western Baja California Peninsula, Sept. 2, 2009.

Luke's business practices. "U.S. citizens have reported instances of withholding care for payment, failing to provide itemized lists of charges, ordering unnecessary procedures, withholding U.S. passports, obstructing medical evacuations, and refusing to discharge patients without

payment," the consulate said in the alert.

The hospital refused to comment when contacted by phone and email Thursday.

The consulate urged U.S. citizens to go to other hospitals listed on the consulate's web page.

There is some evidence

that St. Luke's pays or otherwise compensates ambulances and hotels to send American patients there.

The consulate wrote, "Please be advised that hotels and resorts in the Los Cabos area may have existing contracts or informal relationships with St. Luke's."

Associated Press

That was an apparent reference to reports in local media that the hospital pays ambulance drivers to channel American patients to St. Luke's.

The practice is apparently longstanding. An English-language forum for travelers and residents of Los Cabos posted a comment six years ago that read "Be aware that St. Luke's has ambulance chasers out all the time."

"Apparently the drivers are paid a healthy fee for picking you up off the street and bringing you to St. Luke's," according to the post by a travel agent. "My Cabo friends told me that as long as I could talk to keep screaming DO NOT TAKE ME TO St. Luke's!!!"

Perhaps one of the most heart-wrenching accounts was written in a formal complaint filed in August by Scott Lairson, a Los Angeles man whose wife, Patricia Lairson, was rushed to St. Luke's while the couple were vacationing there in June. She was diagnosed with acute respiratory failure and pneumonia due to COVID-19. □

Vatican selling London property at heart of fraud trial

By NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press

ROME (AP) — The Vatican said Friday it has signed a contract to sell a luxury London building that is at the heart of a fraud and embezzlement trial under way in the Vatican's criminal tribunal, recovering more than it expected from the loss-making investment. The Vatican's economy ministry also revealed, in releasing the the Holy See's budget for 2022, that 10% of the deposit has been received and the sale is expected to be concluded in June. The budget foresees a narrowing of the Holy See's deficit to €33 million euros (\$37 million) from €42 million euros last year.

The head of the ministry, the Rev. Juan Antonio Guerrero Alves, told Vatican media that the loss from the London building had already been accounted for in the

Holy See's balance sheets. No figures were given, including on the final sale price of the property, but Guerrero said it had sold for more than its appraisal price.

The Vatican's purchase of the building, located at 60 Sloan Ave. in London's Chelsea neighborhood, has been one of the blackest marks on the Vatican's finances in recent years. The Secretariat of State poured some 350 million euros into the investment, much of it donations from the faithful, for a building that its previous owner had purchased for 129 million pounds — less than half the sum invested.

The scandal exposed the incompetence of the Vatican's monsignors in managing its coffers, since they signed away voting shares in the deal and agreed to pay exorbitant fees need-

lessly to Italians who were known in business circles for their shady dealings.

Vatican prosecutors have accused the Holy See's longtime money manager, Italian brokers and lawyers of fleecing the Holy See in the various contortions of the deal and of then extorting the Vatican of 15 million euros to finally get full ownership of the property, a former Harrods warehouse.

Pope Francis had announced his intention to get rid of the property in 2020 when he ordered the Secretariat of State to hand over all its remaining assets to a centralized Vatican treasury, since the London fiasco proved how poorly the office's monsignors had managed the financial portfolio.

That reputational blow, combined with the coronavirus pandemic, has impacted the Vatican's bot-



A view of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, on Nov. 10, 2020.
Associated Press

tom line since much of the funding for the original London investment came from the Peter's Pence donations from the faithful that are destined for the pope's charitable works and the upkeep of the Holy See.

In the budget estimates, Guerrero said Peter's Pence donations have continued to decline for several

years, as much as 15% last year, thanks in part to the reduced attendance at Mass during the pandemic, when the collections are usually made.

"This should make us think about other methods of soliciting the help of the faithful and receiving donations," he told Vatican media. □

Syrian fighters set deadline for IS gunmen to surrender

BEIRUT (AP) — U.S.-backed Kurdish-led fighters searched Friday near a Syrian prison for Islamic State group militants and gave an ultimatum to dozens of armed extremists holed up in a small part of the jail to surrender or face an all-out attack, a Kurdish official said. About a half-dozen IS fighters surrendered Friday morning, among scores of militants hiding in a basement in the northern section of the prison, according to Siyamand Ali, a spokesman for the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces. He would not confirm or deny a report by the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, that SDF fighters discovered the bodies of 18 of their comrades inside Gweiran prison, also known as al-Sinaa prison, in northeast Syria on Friday.

The Islamic State group's Jan. 20 attack on the prison was the biggest military operation by the extremist group since the fall of their self-declared caliphate in 2019. It came as the militants staged deadly attacks in both Syria and Iraq that stoked fears that IS may be staging a comeback. The weeklong assault on one of the largest detention facilities in Syria has turned the city of Hassakeh



Syrian Democratic Forces soldier talks on a radio in Hassakeh, northeast Syria, Thursday, Jan. 27, 2022.

Associated Press

into a conflict zone. The Kurdish-led administration declared a curfew and sealed off the city, barring movement in and out. Thousands of people in Hassakeh were displaced in recent days because of the fighting. The SDF claimed Wednesday it had regained full control of the prison — a week after scores of militants overran the facility. The attackers allowed

some to escape but also took hostages, including child detainees, and clashed with SDF fighters in violence that killed dozens. The SDF had said that between 60 and 90 militants were hiding out in the northern section of the prison. Ali said the militants are in the basement of a two-story building and that those who remain inside are refusing to surrender. "Our units are surrounding the building

and are trying to convince them to surrender," he said. "We gave them a deadline and we are besieging them," Ali said by telephone from Hassakeh. He refused to say when the ultimatum ends and the attack begins, for security reasons. The Observatory said SDF fighters are betting that more time will force IS militants to surrender as their food dwindles.

The Hawar News Agency, ANHA, an online Kurdish news service, reported that several automatic rifles, a rocket-propelled grenade and hand grenades were confiscated from the IS gunmen who surrendered Friday. It added that SDF fighters are conducting search operations in the prison as well as several Hassakeh neighborhoods in search for IS sleeper cells. The SDF said about 3,000 inmates have surrendered since its operation to retake the prison's northern wing began three days ago. At least 300 foreign child detainees are believed to be held in the Gweiran facility. Thousands more, mostly under the age of 12, are held with their mothers in locked camps in other parts of northeastern Syria on suspicion of being families of IS members. Most countries have refused to repatriate them, with only 25 out of 60 countries taking back their children, some without their mothers. The Britain-based Observatory put the death toll from the struggle at over 260, including over 180 militants and more than 73 fighters from the Kurdish-led force. At least seven civilians were killed in the fighting, the Observatory said. The SDF said preliminary information put the force's death toll at 35. □

W. African regional bloc suspends Burkina Faso after coup



People take to the streets of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, Jan. 25, 2022 to rally in support of the new military junta that ousted democratically elected President Roch Marc Christian Kabore and seized control of the country.

Associated Press

By FRANCIS KOKUTSE and SAM MEDNICK

ACCRA, Ghana (AP) — West African neighbor states on Friday suspended Burkina Faso in the aftermath of this week's coup, making it the third nation in the regional bloc to be punished for a military takeover in only 18 months, officials said.

The announcement from the bloc known as ECOWAS came days after more than a dozen mutinous soldiers went on state television in Burkina Faso to announce their military takeover of the country — that's under siege from Islamic extremist attacks.

ECOWAS had suspended

neighboring Mali after a coup there in August 2020 and then took similar action against Guinea after the president was overthrown last September.

Mali is also under punishing economic sanctions, including flight bans and asset freezes, after its coup leader failed to organize elections within 18 months as promised.

West African leaders met virtually Friday to discuss the Burkina Faso coup, and a delegation was expected to travel to Ouagadougou in the coming days. Ghanaian President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Ad-

do, the current ECOWAS chairman, called the recent spate of coups in West Africa "a direct violation of our democratic tenets."

"The rest of the world is looking up to us to be firm on this matter," he said.

ECOWAS has faced criticism for its handling of the coups, particularly in Mali where mediators negotiated with the junta on the 18-month deadline for holding democratic elections. Mali's coup leader has said that won't be met, citing security conditions, and has announced a vote four years from now instead. □

COVID hits one of the last uninfected places on the planet

By NICK PERRY and SAM METZ

WELLINGTON, New Zealand

(AP) — When the coronavirus began spreading around the world, the remote Pacific archipelago of Kiribati closed its borders, ensuring the disease didn't reach its shores for nearly two full years.

Kiribati finally began reopening this month, allowing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to charter a plane to bring home 54 of the island nation's citizens. Many of those aboard were missionaries who had left Kiribati before the border closure to spread the faith abroad for what is commonly known as the Mormon church.

Officials tested each returning passenger three times in nearby Fiji, required that they be vaccinated, and put them in quarantine with additional testing when they arrived home.

It wasn't enough.

More than half the passengers tested positive for the virus, which has now slipped out into the community and prompted the government to declare a state of disaster. An initial 36 positive cases from the flight had ballooned to 181 cases by Friday.

Kiribati and several other small Pacific nations were among the last places on the planet to have avoided any virus outbreaks, thanks to their remote locations and strict border controls. But their defenses appear no match against the highly contagious omicron variant.

"Generally speaking, it's inevitable. It will get to every corner of the world," said Helen Petousis-Harris, a vaccine expert at the University of Auckland in New Zealand. "It's a matter of buying enough time to prepare and getting as many people vaccinated as possible."

Only 33% of Kiribati's 113,000 people are fully vaccinated, while 59% have had at least one dose, according to the online scientific publication Our World in Data. And like many other Pacific nations, Kiribati offers only



This photo provided by Broadcom Broadcasting shows a damaged area in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, Thursday, Jan. 20, 2022, following Saturday's volcanic eruption near the Pacific archipelago.

Associated Press

basic health services.

Dr. Api Talemaitaoga, who chairs a network of Indigenous Pacific Island doctors in New Zealand, said Kiribati had only a couple of intensive care beds in the entire nation, and in the past relied on sending its sickest patients to Fiji or New Zealand for treatment.

He said that given the limitations of Kiribati's health system, his first reaction when he heard about the outbreak was, "Oh, my lord."

Kiribati has now opened multiple quarantine sites, declared a curfew and imposed lockdowns. President Taneti Maamau said on social media that the government is using all its resources to manage the situation, and urged people to get vaccinated.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, based in the U.S. state of Utah, has a strong presence in many

Pacific nations, including Kiribati, where its 20,000 members make it the third-largest Christian denomination. The church has about 53,000 missionaries serving full time around the world, working to convert people. The pandemic has presented challenges for their missionary work, which is considered a rite of passage for men as young as 18 and women as young as 19.

As the pandemic ebbed and flowed, the church responded. It recalled about 26,000 missionaries who were serving overseas in June 2020, reassigning them to proselytize online from home before sending some back out into the field five months later.

When COVID-19 vaccines became widely available in many countries in April 2021, church officials encouraged all missionaries to get inoculated and required it of those serving

outside their home countries.

Church spokesperson Sam Penrod said the returning missionaries remained in quarantine, were cooperating with local health authorities and would be released from their service upon completion of their quarantine.

"With Kiribati's borders being closed since the onset of the pandemic, many of these individuals have continued as missionaries well beyond their 18 to 24 months of anticipated service, with some serving as long as 44 months," he said. Before this month's outbreak, Kiribati had reported just two virus cases: crew members on an incoming cargo ship that ultimately wasn't permitted to dock. But the Kiribati charter flight wasn't the first time missionaries returning home to a Pacific island nation tested positive for COVID-19.

In October, a missionary returning to Tonga from service in Africa was reported as the country's first — and so far only — positive case after flying home via New Zealand. Like those returning to Kiribati, he also was vaccinated and quarantined.

Tonga is desperately trying to prevent any outbreaks as it recovers from a devastating volcanic eruption and tsunami earlier this month. The nation of 105,000 has been receiving aid from around the world but has requested that crews from incoming military ships and planes drop their supplies and leave without having any contact with those on the ground.

"They've got enough on their hands without compounding it with the spread of COVID," said Petousis-Harris, the vaccine expert. "Anything they can do to keep it out is going to be important. COVID would be just compounding that disaster."

In the long term, however, it is going to be impossible to stop the virus from entering Tonga or any other community, Petousis-Harris said.

Nearby Samoa, with a population of 205,000, is also trying to prevent its first outbreak. It imposed a lockdown through until Friday evening after 15 passengers on an incoming flight from Australia last week tested positive.

By Thursday, that number had grown to 27, including five front-line nurses who had treated the passengers. Officials said all those infected had been isolated and there was no community outbreak so far.

While the incursion of the virus into the Pacific has prompted lockdowns and other restrictions, there were signs that not all traditional aspects of island life would be lost for long.

"Government has decided to allow fishing," Kiribati declared on Thursday, while listing certain restrictions on times and places. "Only four people will be allowed to be on a boat or part of a group fishing near shore." □

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**Elements Restaurant Present Aruba's only Authentic Aruban & Caribbean Buffet
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overlooking one of the most spectacular beaches in the world**

EAGLE BEACH — Elements Restaurant, located at Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, proudly reveals its Authentic Aruban & Caribbean Buffet, available every Monday through Saturday from 12:30 PM to 3:00 PM for \$24.50 per person. On Sundays the restaurant continues with its famous Sunday Brunch.

"We wanted to create an authentic Aruban menu that, with each bite, will take you back-in-time to your childhood home. We want you to relive the nostalgic flavors of the stews and desserts your parents and grandparents prepared. For our international customers, we want them to enjoy a traditional and culturally enrich dining experience." Ewald Biemans, owner/CEO of Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, explains.

Executive Chef Marc Giesbers, Director of Food and Beverage, and his team of local & Caribbean chefs have been working hard and testing out different dishes to reimagine your lunch dining experience. The rotating menu has everything from local cornbread to polenta sticks, plantains, corn patties, Aruban ceviche, seafood salad, sulz, pickled pork, blood sausage, cucumber or papaya stoba, beef or chicken stews, fish or chicken soup,



jerk chicken, Caribbean seafood paella, a pasta station, and a dessert tasting of flan, cashew cake, local fruit cake, and much more! "Our team is incredibly diverse, and our buffet assortment high-

lights this. Besides our traditional local dishes made by our Aruban chefs and cooks, we also offer various Caribbean dishes created by our Jamaican, Dominican, Haitian, Colombian, and Venezuelan chefs

and cooks. Each chef or cook concentrates on making an authentic dish from their region, highlighting the delightful palettes they remember from infancy." Chef Marc explains. "It is also important to us to support our local farmers as much as possible. Our assortment rotates to include ingredients that are in season, and we source as much as we can locally or from nearby regions." The award-winning and adults-only beachfront restaurant will also continue to offer their regular a-la-carte menus, which cater to all dietary needs, including vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free diets.

Don't forget that the restaurant also offers its ultra romantic private dinners for two in one of their famous beach cabanas. Guests can enjoy their meal and a Caribbean cocktail or mocktail overlooking the spectacular Eagle Beach on Elements' outdoor seating deck. Reservations are recommended and be mindful that the restaurant does not seat groups larger than six persons and does not take cash (all major credit and debit cards are accepted).

For reservations, please visit [www.elementsaruba.com](http://elementsaruba.com) or call +297 583 1100. □



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Watch 'Ask Pilar': our videos show you the other Aruba

ORANJESTAD — Aruba Today offers a series of videos 'Ask Pilar' on their Facebook page Aruba Today and on the website www.arubatoday.com. Since the start, October 2019, more than 20 videos have been created. Let us introduce to you this project and present the people behind it.

Why a video? Besides offering our free daily newspaper, posts on Facebook and Instagram and our website content, we started evaluating the plans for short video's about a year ago. The concept was created by Editor-in-Chief Linda Reijnders to add variety to the product Aruba Today. "There is more to this island than palm trees and beaches and in our videos we wish to inform and educate the visitor by showing local places and characters of any kind. We are all new to this, the goal is not to deliver a technical perfect result, more to motivate our visitors with the places we visit as well as transmitting the good energy coming from it." As the title of the video 'Ask Pilar' already shows, the viewer has the opportunity to actually ask about the topics shown, or even suggest a location for a video. Just ask our host Pilar on Facebook and we will let you know.

The team

Pilar Flores, 35- years- old, is the jolly host of 'Ask Pilar'. She loves doing the videos because she gets to know many interest-

ing places and meet a lot of nice people. "I hope with it that people will get to know and love Aruba the way us locals do."

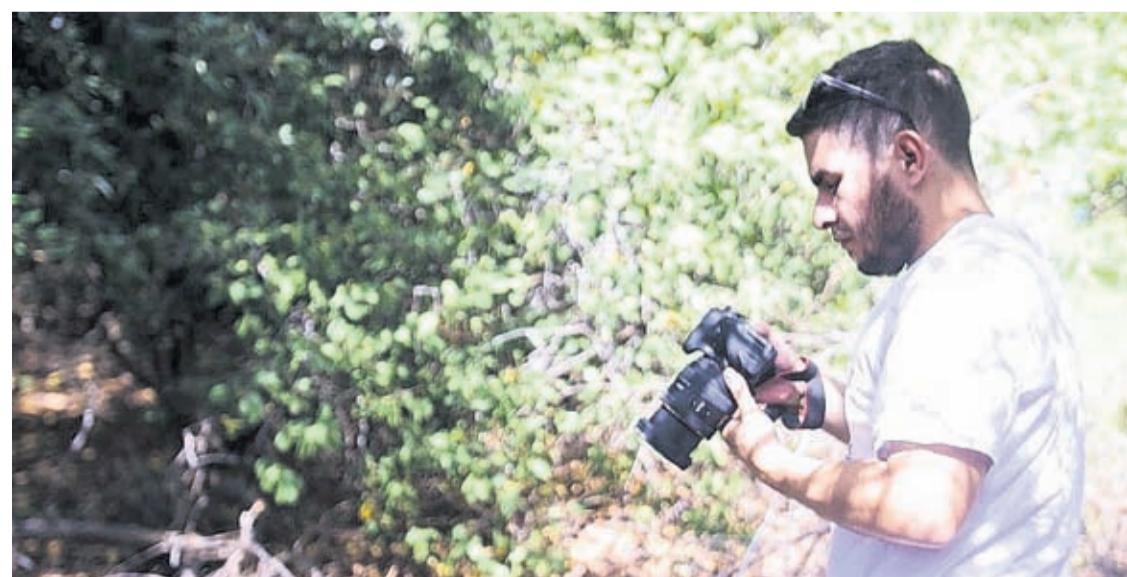
The one capturing the images with his camera and editing them is our videographer Juan Luis Pinto Sotter, Marketing Major at the University of Aruba. "I chose marketing because I wanted a career that kept me physically and mentally active. As a marketer there is a lot of moving around, I can't begin to imagine what the real world will be like."

Video Director of 'Ask Pilar' is Editor-in-Chief Linda Reijnders, working in this current position since July 2017. "I love working in the media, I love to write, create, connect, inform and educate. Working with young, talented and motivated people like Juan Luis and Pilar is a blessing to me. We really enjoy making these Aruba Peeks and we surely hope that rubs off on the viewer."

Corona Street Talk

During the pandemic a new series of videos was launched, dedicated to the COVID-19 crisis where we show people in their daily life during the corona time. Take a look on the website and social media for this new series called Corona Street Talk.

Check us out on Facebook Aruba Today or the website www.arubatoday.com and do not forget to like and share! Thank you for your support.□



infini
by Urvin Croes

Taste limitless possibilities at Infini, where Chef Urvin Croes and his team explores without boundaries and steps with both feet outside of the box to create his most sensational dishes yet. This meticulously designed restaurant located inside Blue Residences on scenic Eagle Beach is a chef's table concept with limited seating where diners are able to interact with the staff and other guests alike throughout the evening.

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Covid Test Center at Paseo has the best experience!



PALM BEACH - Don't spend a single moment of your long awaited holiday in Aruba thinking about your return testing. The Covid Test Center Aruba located at the Paseo Herencia Mall is your travel ally. Just sit back and relax knowing that, when the time comes, their professional staff will make this process a breeze for you. No need to make an appointment or dread the nasal swab; you'll be done with it in a matter of minutes and back to fun stuff.

Some regions require proof or certification of negative COVID-19 status before allowing people into or out of the country. With rules and guidelines varying greatly from country to country, the safest approach is to have recent proof you are COVID-19 negative before you get to the airport. Covid Test Center @ Paseo provides both PCR and Antigen type testing with results within hours; and both are accepted by the CDC.



Covid Test Center @ Paseo is conveniently located at the Paseo Herencia Mall in the heart of the Palm Beach Strip and right across from the Playa Linda and Holiday Inn hotels; only two doors from T.G.I. Friday's. We are open seven days a week, between 9 am and 9 pm. This gives you the choice to walk in when it better suits you. It can be at the start or at the end of your day. No appointment needed here.

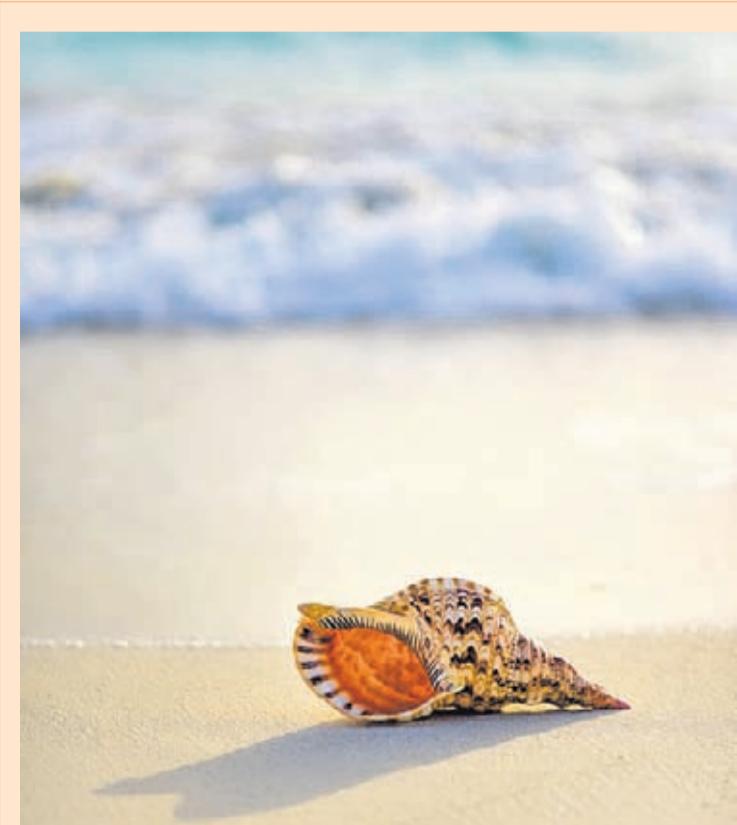
The friendly technicians at Covid Test Center @ Paseo will take your information as we are aware it is imperative that this shows accurately on the results. For a seamless process, please verify that you have provided the correct email to deliver the certificate. Said certificate can be printed at our offices should you wish to do so. We understand that nobody enjoys doing a nasal swab. That is why we take pride in our reputation of being the gentlest swabbers on the island. First, we will not rush you just to go to the next in line. Through clear given instructions



we want you to feel comfortable. When you are ready, we will promptly but tenderly take a proper sample. Many elsewhere traumatized people praise the difference it makes to test with us.

Forget about counting hours before your flight, our turnaround is fast! For travel to the US, for example, a day before will suffice. A great game plan is to test first, then head out for an evening of dining, shopping and entertainment at the Paseo Herencia Mall, home of the water and lights show in the evenings. By the time you are back at the hotel, your results will be ready in your inbox.

A PCR test costs \$75 and results are ready the next day, while Antigen test costs \$35 with same day results. If you are staying at an off-high-rise area property, you can benefit from the free parking our customers receive at the mall lot.). For more information follow us on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter.□



Prohibited by law: Tourist leaving the island with seashells, white sand and corals

ORANJESTAD — For the last months the customs department at the airport intercepted many tourists leaving the island with seashells, white sand and corals as souvenirs.

Conform the international treaty of CITES and our local law which protects our Flora & Fauna, it is completely prohibited to take any seashell, sand and coral outside of Aruba, this in order to protect

our environment. The high amount of seashell, sand and corals confiscated is very strange and it is suspected that our own locals are the once selling these to the tourists, which is unacceptable.

Upon confiscation at the airport the tourist also faces a fine that they have to pay before leaving. This is surely not a pleasant experience for the tourist. This also leads to a nega-

tive reaction which can put our tourism in a negative light.

Let's all give nature the respect it deserves by protecting our environment. Stop collecting seashells, white sand and corals from our shores and stop selling these to our tourist. We want our future generations and visitors to enjoy the beauty of our beaches, shells and corals. Let's all protect what is ours!□

Liz Weston: The mental health risks of retiring

By LIZ WESTON
of NerdWallet

The late Pamela Hixon of Leipsic, Ohio, was eager to retire from her job running a hospice agency. Soon after she quit, however, Hixon spiraled into depression and anxiety. She sought help from counselors and her pastor, but it wasn't enough. Six months after retiring, she took her own life.

"She lost purpose, she lost significance, she lost a sense of meaning in her life," says her son Tony Hixon, a Findlay, Ohio-based wealth manager who wrote about the experience and how it transformed his financial planning practice in a book, "Retirement Stepping Stones: Find Meaning, Live with Purpose, and Leave a Legacy."

Overall, retirees are a contented bunch and many report being happier in retirement than they were at the end of their careers. Older adults are less likely than younger people to experience major depression, says Brent Forester, president of the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry.

Nonetheless, retirement often involves significant



This undated file photo provided by NerdWallet shows Liz Weston, a columnist for personal finance website NerdWallet.com.

Associated Press

losses — of identity, purpose, structure and social contacts — that can trigger depression and other psychiatric illnesses, says Forester, who also heads the geriatric psychiatry division at McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts. "Getting depressed is not a normal part of aging," Forester says. "But one of the risk factors (for depression) is loss, and the loss of one's professional identity, the loss of one's job, is a big one."

RETIRING CAN POSE CHALLENGES

Often, people are too busy working and raising families to develop interests that might offer structure and purpose in retirement, Forester says. Their social networks can disappear if they primarily made friends through work, or they move to a new community after retirement. (Social isolation is another big risk factor for depression and many other health problems.) Substance abuse can cause problems for retirees, as well, Forester says. Some people may use their unstructured time to drink

more or use drugs more often, and aging brains are much more sensitive to the adverse effects of these substances, he adds. People also have time to think about bigger questions of purpose and meaning, Hixon says.

"The age-old question of 'why am I here?' can get crowded out by being busy," Hixon says. "Upon retirement, you do have time, and that question can sometimes plague a person."

HOW TO EASE THE TRANSITION

People may be so desperate to get away from workplace stressors — a bad boss, a too-heavy workload, a rigid schedule — that they don't fully consider the benefits they get from working. Or they may be accustomed to viewing retirement as the finish line and don't think deeply about what their day-to-day lives might look like without work.

"Retirement is a transition, not a destination," says psychologist and retirement coach Dorian Mintzer of Boston. "It's very helpful to think about 'what are you retiring to?'"

Consider how you'll spend

your days and what might offer "a sense of connection, engagement, purpose and meaning," says Mintzer, co-author of "The Couple's Retirement Puzzle: 10 Must-Have Conversations for Creating an Amazing New Life Together." That might include hobbies, volunteering or time with family, for example. Figure out what gives you joy as well as what new things you'd like to do or learn next.

"What are some of the things you had to put on the back burner when you were younger?" Mintzer asks.

Part-time work is another option, she says. Reducing the hours you work can help alleviate burnout while allowing you more free time. Talking with a therapist, coach or sympathetic friend may ease the transition as well.

"Get support from people. Don't be afraid to ask for help," Mintzer says.

WHEN AND WHERE TO FIND HELP

Of course, many people are pushed into retirement earlier than they planned because of job loss, poor health or unexpected events such as the current pandemic. □

FAA clears Verizon and AT&T to turn on more 5G cell towers

By DAVID KOENIG

Federal safety regulators say they have cleared the way for Verizon and AT&T to power up more towers for new 5G service without causing radio interference with airplanes.

The Federal Aviation Administration said Friday that it took the steps after receiving details from the telecommunications companies about the location of wireless transmitters.

The FAA said the data helped it to better map areas around airports where new high-speed 5G service won't hinder the ability of planes to land during poor weather.

Verizon and AT&T declined to comment. Nick Ludlum, a spokesman for the telecommunications trade

group CTIA, called it a "positive development that highlights the considerable progress the wireless industry, aviation industry, FAA and FCC are making to ensure robust 5G service and safe flights."

Aviation groups and the FAA had warned that the companies' 5G service, which uses part of the radio spectrum called C-Band, was too close to the spectrum range used by instruments that measure the height of planes above the ground — crucial information for landing in low visibility.

Verizon and AT&T disputed the FAA's warning, but they twice agreed to delay launching new 5G and temporarily delayed it around many airports even

as they began offering the service in many U.S. cities on Jan. 19.

Since the dispute came to a head, the FAA has cleared most types of airline planes to operate around 5G signals, saying that their height-measuring devices, called radio altimeters, are safe from radio interference.

Dire predictions of thousands of canceled flights did not come true, but dozens of flights were grounded by 5G concerns, including U.S.-bound international flights last week and some domestic flights this week at Paine Field near Seattle. Some small airline planes, notably a group of Embraer regional jets, have not been cleared.

"It's too early to declare vic-



A passenger uses a laptop aboard a commercial airline flight from Boston to Atlanta on July 1, 2017.

Associated Press

tory," Faye Malarkey Black, president of the Regional Airline Association, said earlier this week. "This is not fixed. We're not fixed." Regional airlines — smaller

companies that operate flights under contract with large airlines — faced limitations on a large chunk of their fleets during poor weather, Black said. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 38 Thrilled

1 Music award 39 Pub brews 40 Scooter's cousins

7 Rough shacks

11 Save

12 Hand or foot

13 Certify

14 Layered

mineral

15 Subatomic

particles

16 Overly confident

17 Frau's spouse

18 King of music

19 Galley needs

21 Roulette bet

22 "Blinding Lights" singer

25 Dove call

26 Forest plant

27 Alters, as a skirt

29 They may clash

33 Shaq of the NBA

34 Danger

35 Sandbox toy

36 Spot

37 Paddy crop



Yesterday's answer

| | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| 3 Silents | 10 Didn't budge | 24 Patella |
| star | Mary | 16 Bank |
| 18 range | 6 So far | 20 Terrible |
| music | 7 Comic's forte | 22 Pedicure |
| needs | 8 Tapestry subject | 23 Hockey team's |
| 22 "Blinding Lights" singer | 9 Amused | 19 advantage |
| 25 Dove call | | 20 Stanislaw |
| 26 Forest plant | | 21 |
| 27 Alters, as a skirt | 22 23 | 24 |
| 29 They may clash | 25 | 26 |
| 33 Shaq of the NBA | 27 28 | 29 30 31 32 |
| 34 Danger | 33 | 34 |
| 35 Sandbox toy | 35 | 36 |
| 36 Spot | 37 | 38 |
| 37 Paddy crop | 39 | 40 |

1-29

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

1-29

CRYPTOQUOTE

XJBBPZ MWZ JT Iuzg Eav'Kz

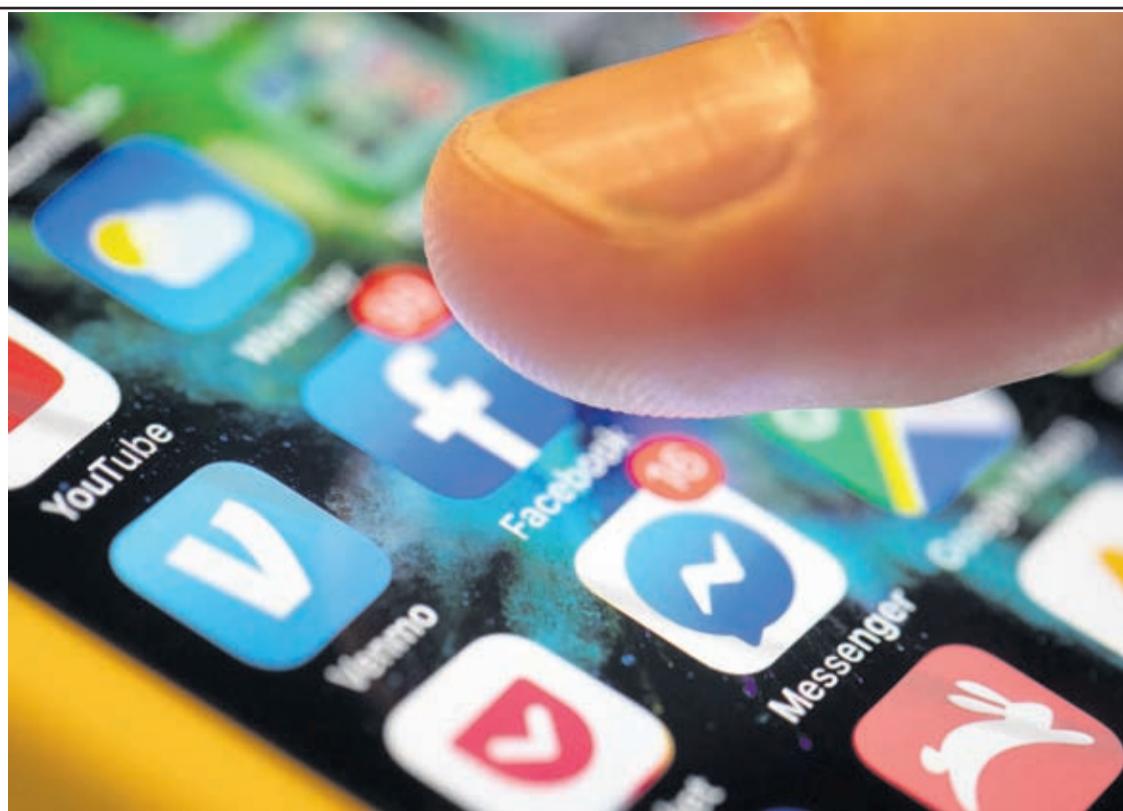
Xzr Ta XMge NzAnPz RUmR

ZKzye Gzi NZytag Eav XzzR

YzxJgbt Eav As Taxzagz

Zptz. — Awbzg Gmtu

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: RESPECT SHOULD BE EARNED BY ACTIONS, AND NOT ACQUIRED BY YEARS — SOURCE UNKNOWN



An iPhone displays the apps for Facebook and Messenger in New Orleans, Aug. 11, 2019.

Associated Press

EXPLAINER: How sweeping EU rules would curb tech companies

By KELVIN CHAN
AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Online companies would have to ramp up efforts to keep harmful content off their platforms and take other steps to protect users under rules that European Union lawmakers approved Thursday.

The 27-nation bloc has gained a reputation as a trendsetter in the growing global push to rein in big tech companies facing withering criticism over misinformation, hate speech and other harmful content on their platforms.

Here's a look at the draft EU rules, known as the Digital Services Act, and why they would make an impact:

WHAT IS THE DIGITAL SERVICES ACT?

The legislation is part of a sweeping overhaul of the European Union's digital rules aimed at ensuring online companies, including tech giants like Google and Facebook parent Meta, protect users on their platforms and treat rivals fairly. It's an update of the EU's two-decade-old e-commerce directive.

"The Digital Services Act could now become the new gold standard for digital regulation, not just in Europe but around the world," the lead EU lawmaker on the bill, Christel Schaldemose, said during a debate Wednesday. "Big tech nations like the U.S. or China are watching closely to see what we're now going to agree."

The proposals are one-half of flagship digital regulations drafted by the bloc. EU lawmakers also are working on the Digital Markets Act, which is aimed at reining in the power of the biggest online "gatekeepers." Both will face further negotiations with EU member countries before taking effect. Getting the Digital Services Act through the EU Parliament is "a huge step in tackling the social problems caused by online platforms," said Zach Meyers, a senior re-

search fellow at the Centre for European Reform think tank.

Similar efforts are underway in the U.S., but there are deep divisions between Republicans who criticize platforms for censoring their views and Democrats who slam them for failing to act.

"If EU member-states reach agreement with Parliament in the coming months, the EU will show a way that other democracies can reconcile these different political interests," Meyers said.

WHAT WILL IT COVER?

The Digital Services Act includes a raft of measures aimed at better protecting internet users and their "fundamental rights online." Tech companies would be held more responsible for content on their platforms, with requirements to beef up flagging and removal of illegal content like hate speech or dodgy goods and services sold online like counterfeit sneakers or unsafe toys.

To address worries that takedown notices would infringe on freedom of speech, lawmakers added safeguards to ensure they're handled in a "non-arbitrary and non-discriminatory manner," the EU Parliament said. Online platforms would have to be more transparent about their algorithms that recommend the next video to watch, product to buy or news item at the top of people's social media feeds. So-called recommender systems have been criticized for leading people to more increasingly extreme or polarizing content. The biggest platforms would have to give users at least one option for recommendations not based on profiling.

There are also measures to ban platforms from using "dark patterns" — deceptive techniques to nudge users into doing things they didn't intend to — as well as requiring porn sites to register the identities of users uploading material. □

Toyota heading to moon with cruiser, robotic arms, dreams



This graphic illustration provided by Toyota Motor Corp. shows a vehicle called "Lunar Cruiser" to explore the lunar surface.

By YURI KAGEYAMA
AP Business Writer
TOKYO (AP) — Toyota is working with Japan's space agency on a vehicle to explore the lunar surface, with ambitions to help people live on the moon by 2040 and then go live on Mars, company officials said Friday.

The vehicle being developed with the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency is called Lunar Cruiser, whose name pays homage to the Toyota Land Cruiser sport utility vehicle. Its launch is set for the late 2020's.

The vehicle is based on the idea that people eat, work, sleep and communicate with others safely in cars, and the same can be done in outer space, said Takao Sato, who heads the Lunar Cruiser project at Toyota Motor Corp.

"We see space as an area for our once-in-a-century transformation. By going to space, we may be able to develop telecommunications and other technology that will prove valuable to human life," Sato told The Associated Press.

Gitai Japan Inc., a venture contracted with Toyota, has developed a robotic arm for the Lunar Cruiser, designed to perform tasks such as inspection and maintenance. Its "grapple fixture" allows the arm's

end to be changed so it can work like different tools, scooping, lifting and sweeping.

Gitai Chief Executive Sho Nakanose said he felt the challenge of blasting off into space has basically been met but working in space entails big costs and hazards for astronauts. That's where robots would come in handy, he said. Since its founding in the 1930s, Toyota has fretted about losing a core business because of changing times. It has ventured into housing, boats, jets and robots. Its net-connected sustainable living quarters near Mount Fuji, called Woven City, where construc-

tion is starting this year. Japanese fascination with the moon has been growing.

A private Japanese venture called ispace Inc. is working on lunar rovers, landing and orbiting, and is scheduled for a moon landing later this year. Businessman Yusaku Maezawa, who recently took videos of himself floating around in the International Space Station, has booked an orbit around the moon aboard Tesla CEO Elon Musk's Starship.

Toyota engineer Shinichiro Noda said he is excited about the lunar project, an extension of the automaker's longtime mission

to serve customers and the moon may provide valuable resources for life on Earth.

"Sending our cars to the moon is our mission," he said. Toyota has vehicles almost everywhere. "But this is about taking our cars to somewhere we have never been."q

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| Police Tipline | 11141 |
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| Red Cross | 582 2219 |

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| Prof. Taxi | 588 0035 |
| Taxi D.T.S. | 587 2300 |
| Taxi Serv. Aruba | 583 3232 |
| A1 Taxi Serv. | 280 2828 |

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| American Airlines | 582 2700 |
| Avianca | 588 0059 |
| Jet Blue | 588 2244 |
| Surinam | 582 7896 |

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Narcotics Anonymous
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Fundacion Contra Violencia
Relacional Tel. 583 5400

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Child Abuse Prevention
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Quota Club Tel. 525 2672

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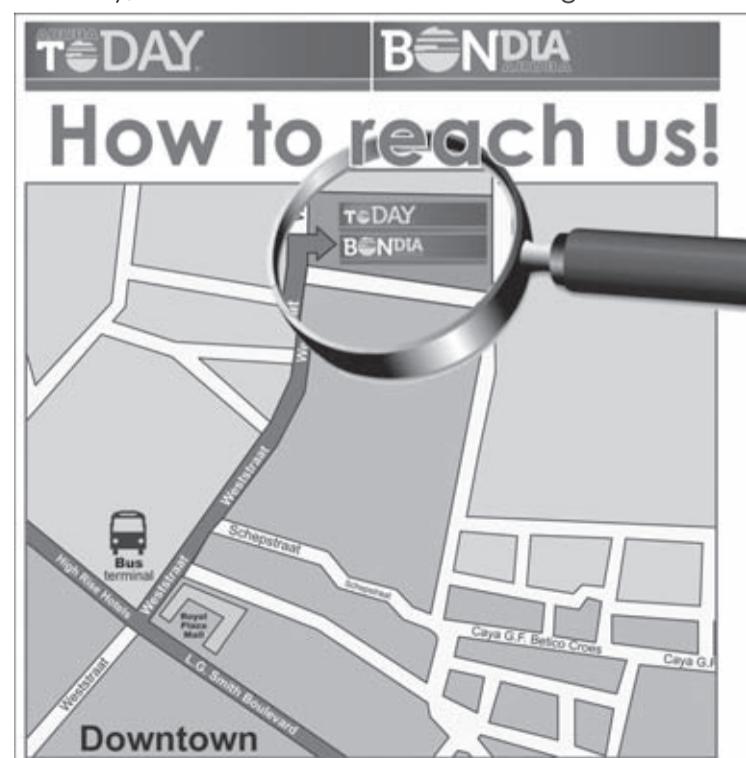
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Major guilds announce film nominees, clarifying Oscar field

By JAKE COYLE

AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Hopes that a few of last year's biggest box-office hits, "Spider-Man: No Way Home" and "No Time to Die," might join the best-picture Oscar race were dealt a blow on Thursday when several of Hollywood's top guilds announced their film nominations.

The Producers Guild nominations are considered one of the strongest predictors for what films are most likely to make the Academy Awards best-picture field. Both the PGA Awards and the film academy use a preferential voting ballot and choose 10 nominees, and their picks often closely overlap.

The 10 films up for the producers' top prize, the Darryl F. Zanuck Award, are: "Being the Ricardos," "Bel-fast," "CODA," "Don't Look Up," "Dune," "King Richard," "Licorice Pizza," "The Power of the Dog," "tick, tick ... BOOM!" and "West Side Story."

Not every PGA nominee always makes it to a best picture nomination, but in the past three years only one film ("The Father," last year) joined the Oscar field after



This image released by 20th Century Studios shows, from left, Ilda Mason as Luz, Ariana DeBose as Anita, and Ana Isabelle as Rosalia in "West Side Story."

Associated Press

missing out with the PGA. The producers, who have nominated films like "The Dark Knight," "Deadpool" and "Skyfall," are also more likely to nominate big-budget successes than the academy. So that the PGA overlooked "No Time To Die" and "Spider-Man: No Way Home" — both of which harbor outside Oscar hopes — suggests their

chances are slim at the Academy Awards.

While the producers nominated a number of starry, bigger-budget films in "Dune" (which sold the most tickets of the bunch) and "West Side Story," five of the nominees came from streamers. Netflix released "The Power of the Dog," "tick, tick ... BOOM!" and "Don't Look Up." Ap-

ple backed "CODA," and Amazon Prime Video put out "Being the Ricardos." Warner Bros.' "Dune" and "King Richard" were also released simultaneously on HBO Max.

Later Thursday, the Directors Guild followed up with their nominations. The nominees for the DGA Awards' top honor are: Paul Thomas Anderson ("Licorice Pizza"),

Kenneth Branagh ("Bel-fast"), Jane Campion ("The Power of the Dog"), Steven Spielberg ("West Side Story") and Denis Villeneuve ("Dune").

Those nominees not only give a snapshot of the most likely Oscar nominees for directing, but also suggest those five films are favorites for a best picture nomination. In the last decade, every DGA nominated film has scored a best-picture nod at the Academy Awards.

Campion, a DGA nominee for 1993's "The Piano," is only the second woman to be nominated twice for the guild's top award. It's Spielberg's 12th nomination from the Directors Guild, not including the lifetime achievement award he was given in 2000. He's won three times before.

Four women were among the guild's nominees for best first feature for directing. The nominees are: Maggie Gyllenhaal ("The Lost Daughter"), Rebecca Hall ("Passing"), Tatiana Huezo ("Prayers for the Stolen"), Lin-Manuel Miranda ("Tick, Tick ... BOOM!"), Michael Sarnoski ("Pig") and Emma Seligman ("Shiva Baby"). □

Spotify says it will grant Young's request to remove music



Neil Young poses for a portrait in Santa Monica, Calif. on Sept. 9, 2019.

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Neil Young's music will be removed from Spotify at his request, following the veteran rock star's protest over the streaming service airing a popular podcast that featured a figure criticized for spreading COVID

misinformation.

Spotify, in a statement on Wednesday, said that it regretted Young's decision, "but hope to welcome him back soon."

It wasn't immediately clear when his music will actually be taken down.

"I realized I could not continue to support Spotify's life-threatening misinformation to the music loving people," Young said in a statement.

Young had asked his management and record company publicly on Monday to remove his music from the popular streaming service, where he had more than six million monthly listeners, according to his Spotify home page.

Spotify airs the popular podcast, "The Joe Rogan Experience," where last month the comedian interviewed Dr. Robert Malone, an infectious disease specialist who has become a hero in the anti-vaccine community. Malone has been banned from Twitter for spreading COVID misinformation and has falsely

suggested that millions of people have been hypnotized into believing that the vaccines work to prevent serious disease.

Spotify said in a statement on Thursday that "we have detailed content policies in place and we've removed over 20,000 podcast episodes related to COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic."

The company says it has a team of experts that reviews content, and it's removed if the information presented can cause harm or pose a direct threat to public health. False suggestions that injecting bleach could fight the virus, that COVID-19 wasn't real or that vaccines could be deadly were among those removed from the platform.

Spotify would not comment on Rogan's podcast. Young said that many of Spotify's listeners are hearing misleading information about COVID. They're young, "impressionable and easy to swing to the wrong side of the truth," he said.

"These young people believe Spotify would never present grossly unfactual information," he said. "They unfortunately are wrong. I knew I had to try to point that out."

He said he appreciated his record company, Warner Brothers, standing behind him, since Spotify is responsible for 60 percent of his music being streamed all over the world. He said it was "a huge loss for my record company to absorb." □

Nadal, Medvedev to meet in history-making Australian final



Daniil Medvedev of Russia, left, gestures to chair umpire during his semifinal match; and Rafael Nadal of Spain, right, reacts during his semifinal match at the Australian Open tennis championships in Melbourne, Australia, Friday, Jan. 28, 2022.

Associated Press

By JOHN PYE
AP Sports Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP)

— Rafael Nadal is within one victory of a men's record 21st Grand Slam singles title. He'll have to beat second-seeded Daniil Medvedev in the Australian Open final on Sunday to make history. And Medvedev is chasing a piece of history of his own after beating Stefanos Tsitsipas 7-6 (5), 4-6, 6-4, 6-1 in a heated semifinal on Friday. The U.S. Open champion is aiming to be the first man in the Open era to win his second Grand Slam title at the next major tournament.

Nadal advanced to the final in Australia for the sixth time with a 6-3, 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 win in a mostly lopsided contest against seventh-seeded Matteo Berrettini in the first of the men's semifinals.

Medvedev had a more tempestuous and challenging run to back-to-back Australian Open finals. He had to deal with a hostile crowd in his second-round win over Nick Kyrgios, had to save a match point and rally from two sets down to beat Felix Auger-Aliassime in a nearly five-hour quarterfinal win. Then he had to regain his composure after an angry outburst in

the second set of the semifinals.

The Russian yelled at chair umpire Jaume Campistol in the changeover after serving a double-fault to concede a late break, getting a code violation for a visible obscenity when he made a gesture with his arm to the pro-Tsitsipas crowd, and then demanded that his opponent be cautioned for receiving coaching from his father — in Greek — from the stands.

Medvedev returned after Tsitsipas converted his third set point to level the match and he again urged the umpire to give the French Open runner-up a code violation.

He then took a five-minute break, took control late in the third set and then reeled off the last five games after Tsitsipas was eventually cautioned for coaching.

Nadal's run to a 29th Grand Slam final has been comparatively serene.

After the last point, he stopped, beamed a wide grin and then punched the air three times.

Nadal arrived in Australia not knowing how long he would last after months off the tour dealing with a serious foot injury and then a bout of COVID-19. He skipped Wimbledon after

losing in the French Open semifinals to Novak Djokovic, and didn't play at all after August.

"Every day has been an issue in terms of problems on the foot. Doubts still here ... probably for the rest of my career," Nadal said. "But for me it's amazing ... (to) just compete and play tennis at the high level again, facing the most important players of the world."

Last month, he wasn't even sure he'd be able to return to the tour. But he won a tune-up tournament in Melbourne and has taken six straight matches at the first Grand Slam event of the year.

One more and he'll break the record of 20 major championships he shares with Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic.

Nadal would also become just the fourth man to win all four Grand Slam titles at least twice.

Nadal's win over Wimbledon runner-up Berrettini, under a closed roof at Rod Laver Arena, because of heavy rain, was his 500th on hard courts at tour level. But he's only won the Australian Open once, in 2009, and adding a second was his primary focus.

"For me, it's all about the Australian Open more than anything else," Nadal said

in his on-court interview. "I have been a little unlucky (here) in my career with some injuries. I played some amazing finals with good chances."

He lost classic five-set finals at Melbourne Park to Djokovic in 2012 and Federer in '17. Nadal lost to Stan Wawrinka in 2014 and against Djokovic three years ago.

"I feel very lucky that I won once," he said. "I never thought about another chance in 2022."

Nadal broke Berrettini's opening service games in the first two sets and, after dropping the third set on a rare service lapse, he rallied to finish off the match in just under three hours. That in itself was a relief after his long quarterfinal win over Denis Shapovalov.

Nadal was the only member of the so-called Big Three who had a chance to break the deadlock in Australia this time.

Federer is out while recovering from knee surgery. Djokovic, who has won nine of his Grand Slam titles at Melbourne Park, was deported after an 11-day visa saga on the eve of the tournament because he failed to meet Australia's strict COVID-19 vaccination requirements.

"To be able to be where

I am today, I really can't explain in words how important is for me in terms of energy, in terms of personal satisfaction, in terms of being very thankful," Nadal said. "For me it's something completely unexpected." He said he was taking a different approach to life now, but not at game time. "Of course always with competitive spirit that I have, because I can't go against that. It's my personal DNA," he said. "But in some way, I don't know, just be what I am and be able to have the chance to compete at this level, it's a positive energy for me to keep going."

Medvedev will need to take a calmer approach after beating Tsitsipas in the semifinals for the second year in a row at Melbourne Park.

He lost to Djokovic in last year's final, but then beat the No. 1-ranked player for the U.S. Open title.

He said he regretted his outbursts at the umpire, explaining it was in the heat of the moment in a very emotional tournament.

"I'm going to play again against one of the greatest," Medvedev said of Sunday's final. "Again, I'm going to play somebody going for the 21st Slam. I'm ready." □

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